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31 March 1989

Virtually every important aspect of the Cuban Missile Crisis was lied about, concealed, mystified and/or misunderstood at the time and for the next quarter of a century.

Various "lessons" have been learned on the basis of this mass of misinformation and misunderstanding which are clearly, in retrospect, mistaken and seriously misleading.

That is to say that a generation of citizens and even elite decision-makers have been seriously misled in their understanding of vital political phenomena, foreign and domestic, by these deliberately mishapen "lessons."

There is strong reason to believe that the events of the crisis and the mistaken lessons drawn from selective and misleading accounts of it contributed directly to the massive nuclear arms race ensuing over the next quarter century and to the American decision to intervene massively, and the tactics it chose, in Vietnam.

To say this is to question the almost universal appreciation of the tactics and decision process in the Cuban Missile Crisis--whatever those truly were--as having led to an unequivocal "success"; and to raise the importance of discovering, at last, what those tactics and their immediate consequences really were, so as to counter disastrously misleading lessons and form others that are better guides to policy.

The earliest accounts of the decision process--seriously misleading in their selective omissions and misstatements--were by two participants, Schlesinger and Sorensen: two of the participants in the Kennedy School discussions.

Sorensen was the editor of RFK's posthumously released memoir (RFK's "draft" of this is lost or unavailable, raising the question of the actual relative degree of authorship of this important source--as in the case of "JFK's" Profiles in Courage, "drafted" by Sorensen). While this filled in some important gaps in the earlier accounts, it left other distortions uncorrected or reaffirmed.

The same is true of Elie Abel's account based on interviews with the participants, several of whom were at the Harvard symposia: in particular, McNamara and Bundy, who had also made public statements at the time that were seriously misleading.

Thus, to rely on the recollections and reflections of former participants like these--as the Kennedy School investigations do--is to rely on the interpretations of persons who not only have their own historical roles to defend but who have a past history

of actively distorting the record (not only where it concerns themselves) and who have that history ^{of distortion} to cover up as well.

Yet the transcripts of symposia and the commentaries released by the Kennedy School Project show no concern about this problem, or even any awareness of it. The rules of decorum at the Kennedy School apparently preclude questioning participants about contradictions between their accounts either now or earlier and newly-revealed evidence such as ExComm transcripts or declassified documents.

For example, all of these accounts (plus Graham Allison's, also based on interviews including these same people) make the crucial assertion that the ExComm unanimously [CHECK WORDING] rejected the Soviet proposal to trade Turkish and Cuban IRBMs on the morning of October 27: i.e., they chose, without reservations, to prolong the crisis, which was rapidly moving toward open hostilities, rather than to resolve it on these terms which, all purportedly agreed, were totally unacceptable. As McNamara put it most recently in the WGBH account of February, 1989 (taped earlier, but surely changeable up to release), it was "inconceivable" to the members of the ExComm that a public trade be accepted.

That assertion is false. McNamara knew it was false. And every member of the ExComm has known it to be false over the entire 27-year period since the crisis: or to be precise, since October 19, 1962, when McNamara himself asserted that such a trade was probably necessary, inevitable, and the most favorable outcome to be expected; or October 20, when President Kennedy implied that it was an acceptable subject for negotiations once the blockade had been instituted; or particularly, October 27, when President Kennedy repeatedly argued precisely for settling the crisis on this basis.

Private > All this has been known since 1986, before the Harvard seminars, with the release of Excomm transcripts and minutes. Yet not once in the Kennedy School output does anyone raise this discrepancy, or question any of those who have maintained this deceit over a quarter of a century why they had done so, either initially or for so long. Nor does anyone address the question of the impact on public understanding--and that of subsequent officials in various countries--and perhaps on policy of this continued deception. (The implications are, in fact, varied, far-reaching, and of unusual importance).

The only implications of the new revelations--including that of Rusk in 1987, that JFK returned to this possible resolution of the crisis even after RFK had delivered an ultimatum to Dobrynin on the night of October 27--pursued in these discussions are those that are favorable to Kennedy. (Favorable, that is, from a dovish point of view, in keeping with the current spirit of

detente. Nitze and Dillon find the Rusk revelation dismaying, though they should hardly claim to be so surprised by it, in view of the October 27 transcript released earlier, giving the President's views as they had heard them directly. Again, the question of why the "Cordier ploy" had to be kept secret so long, and why at the time it was kept secret even from the ExComm fails to get the attention it deserves in these discussions.)

What is not explored includes the question of the actual level of risk during the blockade and the aerial reconnaissance, and the likelihood that, if Khrushchev failed to back down, an airstrike or invasion would have occurred despite Kennedy's reported reluctance to launch them and his willingness to consider a public trade.

This leads to the potentially embarrassing--hence (?) not explored--question: how justifiable was this level of risk, from October 22 on, and particularly its prolongation on October 27 (as recon planes were fired upon, and a SAC U-2 wandered over the Soviet Union), given the newly-revealed reality that a resolution on the basis of a public trade was not at all "inconceivable" in the eyes of the President himself?

cz/crises

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\crisis\pattern
6 April 1989

*Reasons for saying, and effects of saying:
The crisis as surprise, surprise as failure*

In labelling an ongoing situation a "crisis," the president is saying: "Watch this. Watch me." *whether he wants to or not. (Health of the policy the leader)*

He directs attention to the White House, even though the ensuing decision process may be shrouded in special secrecy: *Presiding channel personal control.* which can also serve to focus attention: suspense, mystery, anxiety...What is happening? When will they tell us? What will he do? "Wait."

("No one knows what he will do," said Max Frankel on May 8, 1972, as the NSC met to hear Nixon's decision to mine Haiphong: while I sat in despair, knowing what he would do.) *The NYT*

necessity
Defense He is also saying: There is no time for consultation, or adequate consultation: of Congress, allies, public debate. No time for going through channels, normal procedures. I must decide.

In other words, it is an emergency. Emergency procedures, rules, apply: whether or not (as in pre-Hitler Germany) they are provided for in the Constitution. The "normal" Constitution and laws are suspended. It is like a State of Emergency, or State of Siege. *(see changes in crisis). Thus his responsibility. Who - or how...*

Usually it is implied: the national security is at stake. This is normally taken to mean: many lives are at stake; the defense of the country, or our forces, against attack is at stake. Or it may mean: major national policies or institutions are threatened with sudden, unforeseen failure, or challenge. (The underlying problem seen or felt by the leadership may be very different from these; but these are suggested, projected to the public).

This description of the situation--which may be internal to the government, hidden at first, or indefinitely, from the public--suggests to those made aware of it, a possible need and justification for using means that would normally be rejected or forbidden: violent, dangerous, deceptive, illegal, unconstitutional, violating earlier promises, agreements or predictions, highly costly, unpredictable or uncontrollable, creating dangerous precedents, risking destructive side-effects or "collateral damage," indiscriminately murderous, risking or initiating war... *and procedures... personal power...*

Indeed, there is an incentive--perhaps unconscious--to perceive a situation as a crisis, to perceive an urgent, overwhelming threat, in order to claim a freedom from ordinary procedures and consultation, and from restrictions on means, so

see changes

as to use such means on a variety of preexisting problems that would not otherwise be held to justify them.

The "proclamation" or perception of a "crisis" has the form and substance of a defense of necessity or justification in legal proceedings, proposing to justify acts that would under other circumstances be forbidden (illegal) on the grounds that they were necessary in this instance to avert greater harm that was otherwise imminent. Where "imminence" is an element of the defense, as is usual, the defense effectively applies to "crises," as the term is used by national security officials.

The other elements of the legal defense are also relevant: A lack of alternatives that would be both "legal"--or, without the drawbacks described above, that would "normally" preclude such means--and effective. A lack of time to wait for or create such alternatives (the harm to be averted is "imminent"). Reason to believe that the normally-forbidden means can be effective in averting the harm.

He is *calling* attention, judgment; he is *justifying* his action in advance. But he has *reason to fear* attention, to *hide* facts, no matter how it comes out; because *the proclamation of crisis implies a serious case of profound uncertainty; after*

But why has this situation arisen? Why the failure to have prepared legal or acceptable measures to deal with such a problem, in time? The usual answer, usually realistic, is that the events, in these circumstances, were unprepared-for because they were regarded as very unlikely or wholly unforeseen, and (not quite the same thing) very surprising. But that raises the questions: Why unforeseen? Why surprising? Should blame attach to these faulty predictions, or not? *Surprise creates a presumption of failure: it tells you that by its common, basic analysis, advisors, Pres.*

Great secrecy, even long after the events, generally surrounds the decision-making process of a crisis, and many lies are commonly told about it, precisely to escape blame of the leaders or staffs over issues like these, since surprise is ordinarily admitted (sometimes exaggeratedly) to be an element of the crisis. And wise, prudent leaders with expensive, competent staffs and intelligence apparatuses are not supposed to be surprised; there is a presumption of failure by someone or some subsystem when it occurs. And the leader, or party in power, is ultimately accountable for any failure...

On the day the U-2 photographs of the Soviet missiles were being taken, McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Assistant told the public on the program Face the Nation that the administration had no evidence and no expectation that the Soviets would deploy missiles in Cuba.

It was untrue that there was no evidence. The administration later emphasized, "no 'hard' evidence," which comes close to saying, no photographs; but the U-2 flight plan was designed, in fact, to check out some suspicions from evidence--enough to have convinced, for example, Paul Nitze that missiles were there before the flight was scheduled--including some new, persuasive

reports of missile sightings which turned out to be accurate.

But it was also true (according to the then Deputy Director of CIA for Intelligence, Ray Cline, who brought the news to Bundy and to the President) that John F. Kennedy was surprised. By that very fact, he now had a problem. (He had a number of problems, of which this was one: but not the least). Sooner or later, he was going to have to explain why he was surprised.

He could say, falsely, he had not been surprised. This lie, very common under such circumstances, would in this case create new challenges: Why had he, and his assistants, lied, then, in predicting otherwise on September 4 and 13, and as recently as October 14? That path was not promising. Why, then, had he been misled?

A major reason was that the Soviets had taken extraordinary steps to keep their deployment secret, with an effectiveness that US intelligence analysts had not foreseen. They managed, in particular, to keep any mention of the move from occurring in radio communications, which we were monitoring; or from being visible, in transit, to photographic surveillance.

[Summarize: Soviet officials--some of them personally unaware of the move, like Dobrynin--passed on assurances which Kennedy officials took to be unequivocal promises not to put ground missiles in Cuba that could reach the United States. Actually, most of these assertions did not take this unequivocal form, but promised only that Soviet military aid would be "defensive" in character. Throughout the crisis the Soviets maintained consistently that they believed this description covered their missiles, and this is, in fact, very reasonable.

Of course, those who knew of the planned movement knew that their assurances were potentially misleading, since Kennedy made it clear in his September statements that he used the term "defensive" more restrictively, to exclude missiles capable of reaching the US. Moreover, Soviet officials have retrospectively admitted that Khrushchev wanted to be misleading in this period of transit.

But the record--usually misquoted by American officials and accounts relying on them--suggests that the Soviets meant to avoid outright, unequivocal lies, relying for misdirection rather on evasion and ambiguity, in which they were not in fact pursued.

In other words, their verbal performance was well within the normal realm of diplomacy; they probably meant to point to this record, after disclosure, as defense against recriminations of improper or reckless deception. They could well say that it was strikingly easy to deceive the Americans on this point.

which lost credibility to US (esp.) claim the

By dint of JFK to bypass debate, pressure directly to confrontation and public accusation. (and they were off-balance, not ready to admit yet - let alone prompt admission); JFK was caught

There was so little probing, in fact, of Dobrynin's ambiguous formulations about "defensive" armaments that those in the know might well have questioned whether the Americans were truly being deceived, or whether they wanted to be deceived or to be able to claim that they had been deceived, on the record, so that they could claim surprise, afterwards, as an excuse for inaction.

As it turned out, the Americans used their surprise as an excuse for extraordinary action; but again, the deception came so easily, without any need for direct Soviet lies, the Soviets may, during the crisis, have questioned the sincerity of the surprise. They may have felt that they had been sandbagged, that Kennedy had wanted the crisis, wanted to humiliate Khrushchev and attack Cuba, perhaps even wanted to provoke the Soviets into blockading Berlin. (The last suspicion has been explicitly reported by the Soviets recently).

[Recall my own hypotheses about the Soviet strategy, not fully disproven: That Khrushchev hoped, if he were found out, that Kennedy would prefer to "remain ignorant" long enough to be wholly surprised when the Soviets announced the missiles; and that Kennedy would then consider it too late and too risky to attack the missiles.

The PSALM clearance and Kennedy's extraordinary restrictions on dissemination of the raw evidence of offensive weapons would have only looked to Khrushchev, if he had known of these, as confirming these hopes: preparations to behave just that way. Likewise the unchallenging behavior of Kennedy officials in discussion; and, of course, Kennedy's failure to confront Gromyko or, according to Gromyko, to ask him directly at all about missiles.

All this is consistent, perhaps not by chance, with a hypothesis of Kennedy's intent at least to hold open the option of behaving this way. He could have changed his mind because missiles appeared--in hard evidence--too long before the election; too soon for the hard evidence to be withheld that long. (This is a brand new thought for me, as I write: 6 April 1989).

Alex George has written that there was a report--he does not cite a reference--that Kennedy's first reaction on being told of the photos of the missiles by Bundy was to ask whether the news could be held till after the election! Bundy denies this. (CHECK refs] (It would be what I expected from my hypothesis in 1964).

But Bundy does mention his extreme concern to avoid leaks; he even gives this as a reason for not telling the President on

the evening of October 15! (The President "would have stirred up his administration by telephone calls and meetings that could easily have led to leaks. It seemed better to wait twelve hours and protect both his sleep and the secret." 396.

[Sure. Instead, Bundy called up a number of people, who were at various dinners. And Kennedy had to go into meetings Tuesday morning with people who had had 12 more hours of reflection than he--in a situation where everyone claims that made a lot of difference--and without the option of excluding from knowledge those who Bundy had chosen to tell: in a situation where the President had earlier taken unprecedented control of dissemination.

Was the list told--hence, the core of the ExComm--precisely those with PSALM clearance? They would have had to be; so in that sense they were already cleared by the President.]

[Though as for first reactions: we are told that most people's first reaction was hawkish, in favor of air strike. But that is really at the ExComm meetings, after the President had announced his first preference, for airstrike. We haven't been told what others' first reaction actually was. But my interviews with Nitze and Yarmolinsky gave me quite different data on them, Rusk and McNamara.

Maybe it was precisely the President--the one most exposed--who reacted so violently on his first hearing, not the others: who climbed aboard his reaction on hearing it, then got off, some of them, as he himself backed off: leaving some hawks up in the air, convinced the President had got it right the first time, surprisingly, and must not be encouraged to retreat.]

Bundy goes on: "The president felt even more strongly about secrecy than I did. In his bedroom on Tuesday morning he recognized the need at once, and he drove the point home later that morning at his first meeting with those he had chosen to share his problem. Extraordinary precautions must be taken to prevent leaks. [No mention here or elsewhere by Bundy, or anyone else, of the extraordinary precautions that had been in effect for over a month!] Moreover the immediate danger, as almost all of us knew almost instinctively, was not from Russian spies but from American newsmen who, fortunately for us, did not know the race was on. We could not know, that first morning, how much time we had, and we did not set a deadline for decisions and public announcements, but we guessed correctly that we had a few days to a week." 396 [leaks began in three days, serious by Sunday, 5 days]

Thus: a) deadline was set by leaks, not (just) operational status of missiles.

b) Secrecy period was--calculated; and quickly calculated to be short of election.

c) So the PSALM system helped; but not, perhaps, for the purpose originally intended or hoped.

d) Possible miscalculations: McCone, after all, expected the missiles to go in later, after the SAMS were operational (and presumably were being used to deter overflight). That would have been either after the election, or just before it. If one wanted to avoid reacting, or admitting, before the election, the problem would have been to avoid leaks, not of hard evidence, but of suspicious preliminary moves until just before or after the elections. Hard evidence--Bundy here estimates, along with high-level discussions by cleared officials--could only be kept for a week; but even McCone did not expect hard evidence of missiles to be available till after, roughly, October 27--when the SAMS went operational--i.e., about a week before the election.

As for the Soviets: they claim Khrushchev was assured by the general in charge that the whole move and installation could be secret. (Could that have applied to the move alone? Remarkably, that was kept wholly secret, contrary to what CIA would have thought possible. (??) It seems hard to believe that Khrushchev could have believed that for the installation. (Sergei Mikoyan says he and his father did not believe it. Did they see this as critical?)

But Khrushchev may have overestimated the time during which he thought Kennedy could sit on photographic evidence of the installation. (Maybe he was misled by Eisenhower's ability to hold onto the whole U-2 operation for years, with never a leak! His mistake may have been not to notice that the U-2 was then coming up with negative evidence of the presence of missiles, evidence that there were no missiles, evidence that undermined the hawks and the arms race! Kennedy's ability to sit on evidence that there was a new reason to invade Cuba was entirely different!

Left by radio by. to a fall-back, invasion;

which did determine timing

(see refs to election)

Thus: effects of secrecy system = e.g. JFK supposed → internal rage
"must go"

(as, SAM shutdown)

evidence of SU non-control)

see Kautthoff "can't say"

JFK says, "Must go." This ^{clear} forces some admission to say, assess "We should

the strike - with the risk, which are small." And, then, to get

unanimous reversal: forcing Pres to change his mind: LOOK LIKE CARTER ON NESTAGE RAID.

Given McNamara's and Bundy's reaction to the prospect of unauthorized firing (I take it, "under these circumstances": which did not really justify even a remote possibility of a single warhead on the US: to say that is to say that the threats really were total bluffs, or should have been. Yet...as Sorensen points out, a process was underway--launched and continued by Kennedy--which might well have ended with such a decision by Kennedy, justified or not! Does Bundy really deny this? If not, how can he justify, in retrospect, his and Kennedy's prolongation of the process generating these pressures? There was a chance, not only of US attack on the Soviet missiles, but of further escalation that could eventually lead either to the unauthorized launching of a Soviet or US missile somewhere, but to the president's or Khrushchev's own decision to launch one or more. Under the course underway, though by October 27 these were all uncertain contingencies, the joint probability of all the ways this might come about multiplied by their respective probabilities (including the probability that the president would attack the missiles on Cuba) was at least as great as the conditional probability of an unauthorized Soviet launching under attack if the president had decided, that day, definitely to attack the missiles in Cuba. And that latter conditional probability, in Bundy's judgment (and he believes, the president's) was too high to justify such an action. He believes it would have precluded it. Therefore, why were his decisions of October justifiable? (see Bundy 453; and 425.)

see notes